General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

76th plenary meeting
Thursday, 30 November 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 41 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

(a) Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/55/35)

(b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/639)

(c) Draft resolutions A/55/L.45, A/55/L.46, A/55/L.47 and A/55/L.48

Mr. Ahmad (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to participate in the debate on the question of Palestine in the Assembly today, which coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Given the current grave situation in the occupied territories of Palestine, including Jerusalem, it is important for the international community to continue to remind itself on this day of the still-unresolved issue of Palestine and of its responsibility to support the speedy return of the peace process.

Malaysia continues to be deeply dismayed by the spiralling violence that has descended on Palestine, particularly in East Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as in several Arab townships in Israel. More than 280 people — the majority of them Palestinians and Israeli Arabs — have been killed since the latest round of violence, which erupted following the provocative visit to the holy sites at Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 28 September by Mr. Ariel Sharon, the Likud leader. In addition to the deaths and destruction of property suffered by the Palestinians, thousands were wounded as a result of the massive use of deadly force by Israeli security forces. My delegation mourns these senseless deaths and offers our profound condolences to the bereaved families as well as to the Palestinian Authority and the people of Palestine.

Malaysia deplores all forms of violence. We strongly condemn the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians, and we call on them to put an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinians through such actions as prohibiting the movement of persons, goods and resources. These actions constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We have a clear responsibility to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are respected and innocent civilians living under Israeli occupation are protected.

Specific measures must be taken to put an end to the violations against the Palestinian people. Palestinian leaders have asked for a United Nations protection or observer force to monitor the situation on the ground, thereby ensuring the safety of unarmed civilians. This proposal deserves the support of the international community. To assist in the restoration of normalcy Israel should withdraw its armed forces, end

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

00-77365 (E)

the restriction of movement of people and goods, lift financial sanctions against the Palestinian Authority and exercise maximum restraint in managing the current volatile situation.

My delegation calls on Israel to return to the negotiating table and to conduct its negotiations with the Palestinian side in good faith, which is dictated by the need to end and resolve the issue once and for all and to serve the best interests of all concerned. Every effort should be made to pursue the goals of peace, security and cooperation cherished by all in the region. All commitments made under existing agreements must be upheld. Clearly, there are no other options towards this end. It is therefore crucial for the international community to encourage the parties to work towards a negotiated settlement. There is no other viable alternative.

Now, more than ever, the United Nations has an important role to play to ensure the realization of the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine, primarily their right to self-determination. This Organization must continue to be involved, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development. The work of United Nations agencies and committees particularly devoted to the Palestinian issues — such as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories — must continue to be supported.

Malaysia, for its part, has for many years been contributing in cash and in kind to Palestinians through the United Nations or bilaterally. This includes our annual contribution to UNRWA, technical assistance programmes and training of pilots, and upgrading telecommunications as well as other infrastructure.

My delegation fervently hopes that the long quest by the Palestinian people for statehood will be realized soon in fulfilment of their expectations. Malaysia will continue to support the Palestinians in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. This, along with the implementation of all international resolutions on the Palestinian issue, is the only guarantee for lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. We look forward to welcoming the State of Palestine as a member of the community of nations in this Organization. In this regard, we strongly support President Arafat's efforts towards declaring the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

We are confident that under the courageous and wise leadership of President Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian people will triumph in their just struggle. It is imperative for the international community to lend its resolute support to the Palestinian leadership and people in their unrelenting and peaceful quest for justice, freedom and independence.

Consistent with Malaysia's long-standing and unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their leadership, my delegation will continue to join in sponsoring the four draft resolutions on this agenda item, as we have in previous years.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) *(spoke in Arabic)*: The question of Palestine is at a critical stage, with serious repercussions that are halting the peace process between the Arabs and the Israelis mainly because of Israeli prevarication despite Security Council and United Nations resolutions and international accords that Israel signed with the Palestinians.

Israel has transformed the peace process into a process of siege and genocide against the unarmed Palestinian people, using brutal military force to besiege and isolate it on its own homeland. The Israeli occupying force has shown itself to be more brutal than any other, since it specializes in killing children and in employing methods that create widows and orphans as if to bring about the total genocide of the Palestinian people.

Sharon's assault on the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque with a large number of guards is but one link in a long chain of Israeli provocations and violations on Muslim holy sites and shrines. It suffices to refer here to the deliberate fire in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was started by an Israeli extremist in 1969, and to the assault of the Great Rabbi of the Israeli Army and 50 of his followers when they started to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1967. Similar violence was repeated by another rabbi in 1973. Other acts of aggression against Al-Haram Al-Sharif took place in 1998, 1990, 1991, 1993 and 1994. Violence was, and still is, Israel's method of dealing with the Palestinians and with their rights in the Palestinian uprising.

The Palestinian uprising is a response to this method of persecution and coercion. Israel alone bears full responsibility for all acts of violence and terrorism. The violent party is the one that uses force, as Israel has done by using military weapons such as tanks, missiles and helicopter gunships against children armed only with stones. What we are witnessing today in occupied Palestine is born out of deep Palestinian despair. The Palestinians are no longer capable of containing their fury, their suffering and bitterness after long years of Israeli prevarication and delay and non-compliance with Security Council resolutions and various agreements with the Palestinians.

The status of the Palestinians has not changed. They are still under the yoke of occupation, with no signs of gaining the right to independence, freedom and safe living like any other people. Israeli settlements continue to grow and so do policies of home demolition and land seizure. Because of unfair Israeli practices, the unemployment rate among Palestinians is three times greater now than at the time of the signing of the Oslo agreements. The Palestinian annual income has fallen by 33 per cent. The Palestinians do not control their resources or their destiny. They are threatened with imprisonment and detention at all times, and for any reason. The Israeli occupying Power has the right to reoccupy areas from which its forces have withdrawn, arrest whomever they want, close borders, lay siege, spread hunger and turn the occupied territories into a great prison where terror and horror prevail.

The current events in occupied Palestine emphasize the fact that Israel has not given up the arrogance of might and the violence of deterrence. The only guarantee for its security is not security as it claims, but its repression of anyone around it, as its acts demonstrate. Israel is not ready yet for an historic reconciliation with the Palestinians in a way that safeguards freedom and dignity and a just and comprehensive peace for all.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia blames Israel for the serious repercussions of recent events and for the massacres it is carrying out on Palestinian territory. From this rostrum, the Kingdom denounces and condemns all brutal Israeli acts, as represented in its military aggression against the Palestinians. These acts contravene all humanitarian principles. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls upon the international community and the co-sponsors of the peace process to act immediately to stop the Israeli crimes to which the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people are exposed.

On the basis of its interest in a just and comprehensive peace and in bringing about security and stability to the region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has supported the peace talks from the very beginning and has participated in the Madrid Conference and in the multilateral talks. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms that there cannot be a lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East without the full restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to establish its independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must also implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and fully commit itself to the principle of restoring all Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 in return for peace. The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their lands and the right to the return of their property or, for those who do not wish to return, to receive compensation, as well as the full withdrawal from the Syrian Golan occupied in 1967 and the remaining lands in southern Lebanon must be upheld.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia affirms that Jerusalem is an Arab and Islamic question on which there can be no bargaining or concessions. We cannot give it up because it is part and parcel of the occupied Arab territory, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions. We call on the international community in general and the sponsors of the peace process in particular to take a decisive position to force Israel to halt its aggression against unarmed Palestinians, resume the peace process and implement all agreements with the Palestinians without delay. The sponsors of peace have a special responsibility for the deterioration of the current situation, because sponsorship requires the sponsor to ensure the correctness of the approach to peace and the accountability of those responsible for delaying it. The Arab party has been fully committed to the peace process, has made it a strategic option, has shown all possible flexibility and has affirmed its desire for a just and comprehensive peace. Therefore, the sponsors of the peace process should make all efforts to stop the Israeli Government's serious escalation of events and to force it to respect international legitimacy and implement United Nations resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the demands of the recent Arab summit regarding the need to form a neutral fact-finding committee within the United Nations that will refer to the Security Council and to the Commission on Human Rights its report on the serious deterioration in occupied Palestine and the massacres committed by the occupying force. It should also respond to the Palestinian Authority's request to send international observers to the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, to stop all aggression against children, women and civilians in the occupied Arab territories.

Talking about peace is not enough unless it is supported by actions to achieve it, by full commitment to what was agreed and the implementation of all resolutions of international legitimacy. People will not surrender to injustice nor will they accept living under the yoke of occupation without freedom and dignity, because injustice, with the continued failure of the peace process, will only lead to resistance, a legitimate right to end injustice and aggression. The solution is not to surrender, but rather to achieve peace based on justice.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Yesterday the United Nations and the international community observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is befitting that the General Assembly commenced the debate on the question of Palestine under agenda item 41 to coincide with that.

With your permission, Mr. President, Bangladesh will combine its statement on this agenda item with its statement on agenda item 40, "The situation in the Middle East".

At the outset, my delegation would like to commend Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal for his leadership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and for his presentation of the Committee's report contained in document A/55/35.

In a message yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina said that

> "This day, let us recall, was dedicated by the General Assembly to reaffirming that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility in respect of the question of Palestine".

Foreign occupation in itself constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. Prolonged occupation only hampers the process of reconciliation. Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories represents an utter violation and persistent disregard of international law. Israeli settlements in the occupied territories have always been a source of tension. We are disappointed that out of 194 Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, as many as 67 have been built or expanded since the signing of the Oslo accords. The Israeli decision with regard to the expansion of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem was discussed in the Security Council in June 1998. The international community urged Israel to refrain from implementation of its decision because that would create a further imbalance in the population structure in the city in violation of the moratorium imposed by the Security Council.

Bangladesh expresses its utter condemnation of the Israeli policy of systematic violation of basic human rights in the occupied territories. We express our total solidarity with our Palestinian and Arab brothers in that regard. We would like to reiterate here that under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and under relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the occupying Power is obliged to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation. The Security Council, in its resolutions adopted over the years, has reaffirmed its recognition of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem. Hence, there is no scope for unilateral refusal.

During October and this month, we deliberated in the Security Council on the prevailing situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian territories. The tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly also resumed to address this. My delegation made statements in those meetings expressing our deep concern at the escalation of violence in the occupied territories and at the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians by Israeli troops, resulting in heavy casualties. The latest Israeli military actions, which include missile attacks on civilians, do not stand up to any logic. The bombing of the school bus that claimed two civilian lives and injured school children was an act of terrorism. It was most tragic and most uncalled for. We strongly condemn it.

It is sad that the Middle East situation had to deteriorate so fast, particularly when the peace process seemed about to make a breakthrough. We would like to commend the Palestinian leadership for its commitment to reaching a peaceful solution of the Middle East issue. Reaching an agreement at Sharm el-Sheikh against all odds was an eloquent testimony to the Palestinian leadership's commitment to peace. Here, my delegation would also like to express its deep appreciation of the Secretary-General's continuing efforts to contribute to a lasting solution of the Palestinian issue, including his present involvement in the dispatch of a fact-finding mission to the area.

I would like to reiterate Bangladesh's total and unwavering support for the legitimate and inalienable right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent homeland of their own. We would like to underscore the need for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the Palestinian and other Arab territories under occupation by Israel until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and of the international community is essential. My delegation believes that the deployment of international observers would help ease the situation in a big way.

Let me conclude by affirming that Bangladesh has joined in sponsoring the draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly for actions under agenda items 41 and 40.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka has continuously and consistently extended its firm and unqualified support to the Palestinian people's struggle, under the leadership of President Arafat, to realize their inalienable rights, including the right to statehood. The tragic and shocking events that have occurred in the occupied territories over the last several weeks — the heavy loss of life and injury and the extensive destruction of property — give today's consideration in the General Assembly of the question of Palestine profoundly disturbing significance.

While those in a position to do so have endeavoured tirelessly to move towards the ultimate goal of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, it has, since the very inception of United Nations preoccupation with the subject of Palestine, been one of the principal responsibilities of the United Nations to keep the political, economic and social circumstances of the Palestinians of the occupied territories in the public eye. That is a responsibility that the United Nations has sought conscientiously to discharge. The United Nations has done so in a variety of ways, in which a prominent role has been played by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, whose report is before the General Assembly today in document A/55/35.

To the Chairman of the Committee, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, and to the Committee as a whole, I convey Sri Lanka's great appreciation for the work the Committee has done, for the report the Committee has presented to the General Assembly and for the wide-ranging programme the Committee espouses for the Palestinians. The Committee tells in its report of the great difficulties endured in the occupied territories, difficulties that have been extremely disruptive of Palestinian lives and Palestinian lands and that are clearly not in accord with what are regarded now as international standards of human rights and humanitarian values. The Committee speaks in its report of grave matters: settlements and the severe tensions that settlements give rise to; the general and personal hardships caused under the extensive restrictions placed on the movement of persons and goods; hardships caused by closures of Gaza and the West Bank; East Jerusalem and the complexities and special difficulties that East Jerusalem presents; and the very depressed nature of the economic and social circumstances of the occupied territories. The direct and indirect consequences of a general occupation of a people's territory for such a long period of time are traumatic in all-pervasive ways, affecting occupied and occupier alike.

Sri Lanka shared the satisfaction of the international community at the progress that was gradually being made in the peace process, despite delays and obstacles. The report of the Committee narrates the gradual but nonetheless encouraging evolution of the peace process — a process that all had viewed with such hope. There was an expectation that possibly, in the not too distant future, the peace process would bring tangible improvement to the unfortunate conditions in which so many in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem live out their lives.

Yet as the overwhelmingly shocking events in the occupied territories have, regrettably, once again taught us, where deep human emotions are in conflict, where a mood of frustration and hopelessness pervades, where tensions are always close to dangerous and explosive levels, sensitivity and thoughtfulness are the essential, overarching requirements if violence is not to erupt and engulf all, including the innocent and children. Unfortunately, it has been the case that once again humanity has failed in the requirements of sensitivity and thoughtfulness, and violence has erupted and engulfed so many.

In its report, the Committee gives voice to its deep distress at what has transpired since the end of September in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories; it states the nature of the military weaponry, the excessive force of the Israeli authorities and the very large number of Palestinians killed and wounded.

The delegation of Sri Lanka, like so many other delegations, joins in the hope that calm will soon return to those who are now distraught, that the tattered remnants of the peace process might eventually be put together again, made whole, and that there will soon be a return to the processes of dialogue and peace.

Mr. Ben Mustapha (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are considering the question of Palestine once again. This is a tradition we follow every year, but the discussion today is held in a new climate — a negative one compared to that of last year's discussion in the General Assembly and that since the Middle East peace process began.

The situation in the occupied territories is indeed tragic. All previous speakers have portrayed the same picture: there is a great deterioration in the political and security situation in the Palestinian territory, as a result of frustration and loss of hope for the peace process among the inhabitants of the occupied territories. It all happened since the leader of the Israeli Likud Party profaned Al-Aqsa Mosque in a provocative visit that set fire to the powder keg in the occupied territories and created an increase in tension.

At Camp David, Israel declared that it intended to impose a fait accompli situation in occupied Jerusalem, thus emptying the peace process of any meaning. We therefore have a new cycle of violence and confrontation, of which we had long warned. Israel has used excessive force against unarmed civilian Palestinians who have demonstrated against this policy of fait accompli. That is why 300 mortal victims have fallen among the Palestinians, and more than 3,000 have been injured. At the same time, the occupying forces are using their whole oppressive machine and organized terror and repression against Palestinian inhabitants in East Jerusalem and in the other occupied Palestinian territories. This is a flagrant violation of the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. It is against all international norms. This is an unprecedented escalation by Israel. It is a humanitarian catastrophe in the occupied territories and a threat to the safety, security and living conditions of the Palestinians.

We strongly condemn these Israeli actions. We fully support the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights in the struggle against this policy of fait accompli. We are also in solidarity with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to establish their own State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The United Nations must redouble its efforts in effectively defending the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and must adopt practical measures to maintain these rights and use international forces for this purpose. The committee of inquiry is a necessary step to shed light on what has really been happening in the occupied territories. It could also throw light on the flagrant violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. This committee, set up on 7 December 2000, must investigate as rapidly as possible those criminal acts in order to prevent them from happening again, as has been affirmed by the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which met last October and which led to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) in the same month.

The explosive situation in the occupied Palestinian territories puts the Palestinian people at the edge of a precipice. We must cease to consider this crisis simply from the security point of view; rather, we must think of it in terms of the deep-seated reasons for these animosities and confrontations. The situation in the occupied territories is unbalanced and is basically a political problem; it needs a political solution that puts an end to the underlying causes of escalation, tension and confrontation. If we want to get beyond this situation, the international community must shoulder its responsibilities; it must put the peace process back on track and achieve a real solution, rather than a lame one, to the question of Palestine. It must find a way to

give the Palestinian people their inalienable right to an independent State on Palestinian soil, with Jerusalem as its capital. A just and lasting solution must include a total and unconditional withdrawal by Israeli forces from the Golan Heights, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and of the principle of land for peace.

We appeal to the sponsors of the peace process and to the members of the European Union to contribute to restoring peace so as to prevent the peace process from total collapse and to achieve what was agreed upon in Madrid.

In a message addressed to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the President of Tunisia said that Tunisia was concerned and wished to support the just cause of the Palestinian people, as it had done in the past, and urged a return to the negotiating table. This requires that the essential conditions be present. That is, Israel must cease oppressing the defenceless Palestinian people and must withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, so that the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people can be achieved.

The success of the peace process also depends on other international efforts. In this regard, we believe that we must help the people of Palestine rebuild their infrastructure, since this is the core of the future Palestinian State. We must help the Palestinians in all areas. Such international assistance is one of the main foundations of the peace process.

I would like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan, for the efforts he has made, particularly during his last mission to the region. He demonstrated that he was most aware of his responsibilities under the Charter to contain this crisis. This further underscores the central and essential role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, particularly in the Middle East region.

This is a major responsibility of the United Nations because of the many resolutions adopted by this Organization since the beginning of the Middle East question. These resolutions must be implemented by the United Nations, which must not soften its position, but rather continue to work for peace and for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The peace efforts require Israel to implement all the agreements it has freely concluded with the Palestinian side. Israel must stop its settlement-building on Palestinian lands. We must also see to it that the Palestinian people regain their rights under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. A just solution within the final status negotiations must be found for the core questions of Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees. What was discussed at Camp David has led us to doubt whether Israel really wanted a just peace based on international law.

Before concluding, I would like to praise the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the significant efforts it has made under the active presidency of Senegal. This work should lead to a definitive solution of the question of Palestine.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Speaking on behalf of the delegation of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, I would like to make some observations concerning agenda item 41, "Question of Palestine".

Thirty-three years have now elapsed since the Security Council adopted resolution 242 (1967), which calls upon Israel to put an end to its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Throughout these years the Arab Palestinian people have endured all kinds of hardship. With utmost patience, in the hope of seeing an end to the injustice to which they were exposed. But their suffering has increased year after year, and they have grown impatient. So have Arabs and Muslims all over the world, and all those who have suffered the bitterness of being subjected to foreign occupation.

The United Nations was and remains a beacon of hope for the Palestinian people. To say that the United Nations is not the framework for addressing this question and that the two sides have to negotiate independently with each other is wrong.

At a meeting of the General Assembly in 1967, Mr. Abba Eban, Israel's representative to the United Nations at that time, promised that Israel would pursue the path of justice and equity; but most of the Israeli leaders who followed him have not kept that promise, which proved to be devious and misleading.

First, the Palestinian people were deprived of the right to self-determination as a result of the military

occupation. Everyone knows that it is unacceptable to occupy and usurp other peoples' land by force and military action. Israel has complicated the problem by allowing, even encouraging, Israelis to settle in the occupied territories. This settlement process has been made possible with the help of loans and all kinds of facilities provided by Israel to the settlers. Now those settlers have to carry arms day and night in order to protect the settlements, which have been turned into military barracks.

The path pursued by Israel is not the path that a country that really wishes to live within safe and secure international boundaries would choose. Israel has pursued its expansionist policy at the expense of others. In such a situation all honourable, freedom-loving people would try to defend their land and their right to self-determination. This is the situation that is now prevailing in Palestine.

A new phase began on 4 September 1999, when the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum was signed. However, just over a year later — on 28 September 2000 — one of Israel's leaders, Mr. Sharon, trod on Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Mr. Sharon had already set a precedent in instigating the killing of Palestinians. His actions on that day were meant solely to provoke and to instigate violence. The second phase of the intifada began as a consequence of that provocation. Unarmed Palestinians are now being killed daily by lethal force, and countless numbers are being injured or permanently incapacitated, thereby making their lives difficult and painful. Does Israel really expect these people and their families to establish cordial and good-neighbourly relations with it for the rest of their lives?

If the peace process is to resume, then it should be based on the latest agreement, namely, last year's Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. That document was intended to ensure the continuation of the peace process until the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. The peace process should also be based on the principle of land for peace and the imperative of returning to Palestinians all occupied territories, including Holy Jerusalem. Finally, the peace process should resume with a view to implementing the resolutions of the Security Council and the agreements already reached by the two sides.

Only then will we be able to advance to signing a final peace treaty between the two parties, thereby securing the full rights of the Palestinian people. Among those rights are the rights to self-determination; to have their lands returned to them, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif; and to establish their own independent State, which is part and parcel of the right to self-determination.

The delegation of Afghanistan would like to express its support for the request made by Palestine to end Israel's repressive actions and to resume the peace process. We also support Palestine's demand for full implementation of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) and its insistence on the need for the committee of inquiry to take effective measures to uncover the facts surrounding the incidents and to ensure that such things do not happen again. In addition, we support Palestine's call for the provision of international protection to Palestinian civilians living under Israeli occupation. The only means of reaching that objective is to deploy United Nations observers in all areas occupied by Israel since 1967.

In short, Israel will never achieve peace or have a sense of security and safety until it gives back to Palestinians all their legitimate rights and implements all the relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, including the provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. If these commitments are fulfilled, then it will be possible to conclude a peace treaty with the Palestinians.

Mr. Kobayashi (Japan): The violence that broke out in Jerusalem nine weeks ago has now injured many and claimed more than 250 lives, the vast majority of the victims Palestinians, and most of them civilians. We are deeply saddened by this situation, and we extend our profound condolences and sincere sympathies to the bereaved families. With violent clashes and retaliatory actions occurring almost daily, the death toll continues to mount. It was over a month ago, thanks in no small part to the intensive diplomatic efforts of the Secretary-General, as well as those of the United States, Egypt and other States, that an agreement was reached between the two parties, in Sharm el-Sheikh, to cease hostilities. The two parties, however, have not done so, and the tragedy continues.

Japan's view on the current crisis is clear and has been repeatedly expressed. We strongly deplore the escalating violence between the parties concerned, which is still claiming many lives. We strongly condemn acts of provocation, violence and the

excessive use of force, which can in no way be justified, regardless of the context. We deplore the fact that actions contrary to the mutual understanding reached in Sharm el-Sheikh are still taking place in Gaza and the West Bank. The recent bombings and the retaliatory attacks by helicopter gunships, despite efforts to calm the situation, are particularly deplorable. We urge the parties concerned to exercise utmost restraint, to refrain from any escalatory action and to implement the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement. Only then will calm be restored in the region, and the people be able to resume their livelihoods. We also call on all the relevant parties to refrain from any action that could further complicate the situation, such as violating the Blue Line identified by the United Nations last May for the purpose of confirming the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

With each new victim there is an irreversible and tragic loss, and the scars of bitterness and enmity are carved deeper into the hearts of the people, making a peaceful settlement that much more difficult to achieve. The most urgent priority now is to stop the bloodshed and halt the further loss of life. Any additional measures to that end should be seriously considered and pursued. An international presence, with the cooperation of both parties concerned, could be useful in alleviating the situation on the ground, and we support the Secretary-General's efforts to explore that possibility. We also welcome the establishment of the fact-finding committee as a follow-up to the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting. We particularly support the committee's intention to be guided by the goal of breaking the cycle of violence. We hope to see its work carried out as expeditiously as possible.

The current crisis strengthens more than ever our conviction that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East must be achieved. We realize that there is a loss of confidence between the parties, but we call upon them urgently to overcome their mutual distrust so that they can resume their dialogue and seek a peaceful settlement through negotiations. That is the only way to achieve true peace.

The crisis can be resolved only through serious and resourceful measures by the parties concerned and with the active support and encouragement of the international community. We welcome all diplomatic efforts made by the Secretary-General and others in this regard. Japan, for its part, reaffirms its support for peaceful negotiations and remains committed to assisting the peace process to the best of its ability.

Mr. Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): During last year's debate on this agenda item, my delegation, like others, welcomed the message of peace proclaimed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his commitment to the peace process. Regrettably, the euphoria engendered by his election was short-lived, as subsequent negotiations suffered the fate of previous ones, characterized by crises and their resolution, deadlines and their deferment, and culminating in stalemates.

The renewed hope of the international community following the 15-day pastoral retreat at Camp David was dashed by the roiling violence which erupted in September and has claimed hundreds of innocent lives, including those of children. This has generated much pessimism about the future of the peace process, as it threatens to rupture some of the basic agreements sketched out at the Summit. The escalation and intensity of the conflict reflect the disappointment, disenchantment and frustrations of Palestinians with respect to unimplemented agreements. Indeed, the violence is a clear demonstration of the alternative to peace in a region engulfed in endless violence, exacerbated now and again to the level of gruesome bloodshed.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the clashes, especially since they have hardened attitudes and destroyed trust between Israelis and Palestinians. These unfortunate events benefit radicals and extremists on both sides whose only aim is to frustrate the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue. Violence only begets violence, and its tragic consequences leave deep emotional wounds and scars, which traverse generations.

Yet appeals for compromise and flexibility should not undermine the fundamental premise that informed the peace process, notably the land-for-peace principle and relevant United Nations resolutions on the issue, especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which, inter alia, called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied Arab territories.

Against the backdrop of the emotional sentiments both parties attach to Jerusalem, the cradle of religions and treasure of nations, that city's fate is a matter of grave concern to all, as it represents the cornerstone of the peace process. An amicable and just resolution of the future status of Jerusalem would contribute

immensely to the attainment of comprehensive peace and security in the region.

The question of Palestinian refugees is the oldest and largest refugee problem in the world. This emotional issue, which has haunted the conscience of the international community since 1948, was broached at the Camp David summit. It is unacceptable that in this era of democratization, a population of about 4 million is still condemned to live in refugee camps, often in subhuman conditions. Their socio-economic predicament can only breed discontent and despair, which inevitably degenerate into conflict.

We urge Israel to abide by its moral and legal responsibility under General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which, among other things, reiterates the fundamental right of any refugee: that is, the right to return to one's home and property, or compensation for those who choose not to return. In this regard, we commend the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Peter Hansen, and his staff for their tireless efforts to alleviate the hardships faced by Palestinian refugees over the past five decades, through the provision of socio-economic amenities. We appeal to the international community to provide the Agency with adequate funding to enable it to discharge its responsibilities.

For peace to take root and flourish, it must be accompanied by economic growth and development as well as an improvement in the social and living conditions of the people. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People indicates that the plight of Palestinians has continued to worsen over the years, despite some real successes of the Palestinian Authority in establishing basic public institutions, providing social services and creating new jobs. Can we expect a people who have endured so much deprivation and frustration to show any attitude other than distrust and hostility? We appeal to the international community, especially donor countries and United Nations agencies, to continue their assistance to the Palestinian Authority in implementing its social and development programme, so as to create a solid foundation for future peace and stability in the region.

We express our sincere appreciation to the Committee and to other agencies for their sustained commitment to the cause of the Palestinians and for raising awareness of the international community on the question of Palestine. We urge them to continue to keep the question of Palestine under review and to report to the General Assembly and the Security Council as appropriate.

The international community should not renege on its duty to the Palestinian people at this crucial and sensitive moment. We urge the co-sponsors of the peace process and members of the community of nations to strengthen their efforts in order to achieve a just solution of the question of Palestine. International sponsorship of the peace process is the only guarantee of its definite success.

There is no doubt about the eventual emergence of a Palestinian state. No matter what further cost is entailed in terms of human suffering, in this current global dispensation it is inconceivable that a people with their own culture and political identity could forever remain under permanent occupation.

Israel and Palestine are destined to coexist as neighbours, and the horrific results of violence, such as the death of innocent children, could subvert any attempt to promote future peaceful and cordial relations between them. We therefore echo the appeals for the reduction of tensions, with the ultimate objective of restoring calm and paving the way for the resumption of negotiations on the final status agreement. The two leaders must summon the courage to make difficult compromises or risk losing a historic opportunity to end the 52-year-old conflict and bequeath the coming generation a more prosperous future.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today's meeting coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We believe that it is important for the international community to continue to remind itself, on this Day, of the usurped rights and the plight of the Palestinian people, as well as the still-unresolved Palestinian question.

The commemoration of this Day and the consideration by the General Assembly of the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine" are also reminders of the historic responsibility of the international community, represented by the United

Nations, to support the just and rightful struggle of the Palestinian people for the establishment of a national homeland and a comprehensive and just resolution of the issue in all its aspects.

More than half a century after the General Assembly's recognition of the right of the Palestinians to establish an independent State, and despite the scores of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, they are still deprived of their natural right to exercise self-determination on their own territory. As long as this question is not thoroughly addressed and fairly resolved, peace cannot prevail in the region as a whole. It is more obvious now than ever that the question of Palestine constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict and that, without reaching a just and comprehensive solution to this question, the Middle East will remain plagued by instability and tension.

The ongoing heroic intifada of the Palestinian people against Israel, as the occupying Power, is a legitimate and lawful reaction expected of any people under occupation. Remote and recent history has witnessed many acts of resistance against the occupiers and, as long as occupation persists, peoples under occupation have no choice but to rise up against it. It is quite ironic and, at the human level, very sad that some Zionist groups have now embarked on a major public relations campaign, shedding tears for the violation of the human rights of Palestinian children, not by the Israeli soldiers who shoot them to death, but by their mothers who abuse their children by letting them out to throw stones at the soldiers. The extent of deceit and demagoguery is unbelievable. The international community shall not remain indifferent to this travesty of justice and humanity. Whether we rise to this challenge or not, the Palestinian children will be victorious, but, as members of the international community, we should do some soul-searching to determine our capacity to tolerate the extent of the life, blood and misery that Palestinian children must pay for the liberation and victory they deserve.

The continued contempt of the Israeli regime for the will of the international community, and even its disregard for the agreements it has entered into over the past seven years, despite the fact that they were clearly termed in its favour, have persuaded the Palestinians that the Israeli regime will not willingly concede them even their most elementary rights.

The wide-ranging campaign of terror by the Israeli forces against the Palestinian civilians and their right to resist the occupation is appalling and outrageous. At the present time, resort to heavy weaponry against the defenceless Palestinians, the wilful killing of stone-throwing youths, the infliction of collective punishment on an entire population and the restrictions on the right to worship figure prominently among the illegal and criminal activities perpetrated by the occupying Israelis. So far, the resort by the Israelis to excessive and disproportionate force, aimed at suppressing the rightful protests of the Palestinians, has resulted in the killing of hundreds and the injury of thousands of defenceless Palestinian civilians.

Moreover, the massive destruction of property and infrastructure in the Palestinian residential areas, as well as the disruption of economic activities in the occupied territories — due, among other things, to the severe restriction on the movement of persons and goods to, from and inside the occupied territories — are important but less visible aspects of the excessive violence and heavy-handed approach of the Israeli forces against the Palestinians. The impact of such disruption, coupled with the interruption of education, will continue to be felt for years to come.

What the unleashed Israeli military might does is in sharp contrast to the Israeli pretence to peaceful intentions and a desire for peaceful coexistence with the Muslims in the region. The Zionist regime's repeated crimes and heavy-handed approach run counter to all its high-sounding but empty claims to seek peace with its neighbours.

The recent crimes started with another attempt by the Zionists to desecrate the Islamic holy shrine in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. This was in line with the obstinate Israeli policy to alter the Islamic character of Jerusalem through the continuous and persistent process of Judaizing the city, which has prompted indignation and anguish among Muslims throughout the world. I reiterate that the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif is of paramount importance to the entire Islamic world and that all Muslims attach great significance to safeguarding the Islamic identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and to strengthening the steadfastness of its Muslim people. The Islamic world considers Al-Quds to be the capital of the independent State of Palestine and rejects any and all attempts to impose Zionist domination over it.

Since the start of the recent crisis in the occupied territories, the international community, including the Islamic world, has in numerous ways expressed its deep concern and dismay at the atrocities perpetrated by the Israeli troops in the occupied territories. Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) condemns the excessive use of force against the Palestinians. The General Assembly, at its resumed tenth emergency special session, also discussed the illegal Israeli actions in the occupied territories and produced the important resolution ES-10/7, in which it condemned, inter alia,

> "the excessive use of force by the Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians". (*resolution ES-10/7, para. 2*)

Mention should also be made of the resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights at its fifth special session on the grave and massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinians and the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which a harrowing picture of the current situation in the occupied territories is presented. Despite international outrage and clear demands in those resolutions and report, the flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention by the occupying Power continues unabated in the Palestinian occupied territories.

The ongoing disdain of the Israeli leaders for the norms and principles of international law and the decisions of the United Nations further exacerbates the situation in the Middle East and destabilizes the whole region. Therefore, in the short run, we believe that the gravity and persistence of the situation calls for more resolute action on the part of the international community with a view to bringing the Israeli atrocities to an end. This requires, among other things, the early dispatch of a United Nations protection force to the occupied territories, with the aim of providing safety and security for Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation and ensuring freedom of movement and worship.

In view of the fact that the Israelis, in their ruthless suppression of the uprising, have flagrantly violated the basic principles of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, the international community should pave the way for ultimately bringing to justice those responsible for war crimes against Palestinian civilians. Here, I would like to echo the decision of the ninth Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, held in Doha in November 2000, in which the Security Council is requested to constitute an international criminal tribunal to indict the war criminals who have perpetrated savage massacres in the occupied Palestinian territories. In this context, measures should also be contemplated with a view to holding Israel accountable for damages sustained by Palestinian civilians. The first important step in this direction is the conduct of an international inquiry into crimes against innocent Palestinians, which we hope will be carried out and completed in an expeditious, thorough and scrupulous manner.

In the long run, we believe that the root cause of the problem should be dealt with. In Palestine, like everywhere else, a just and durable peace can be secured only through a democratic process regarding the future of the democratic Government of Palestine. To this end, all original inhabitants of Palestine — including Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as the Palestinian refugees who live in diaspora in refugee camps under precarious conditions — should be able to enjoy their inherent rights and participate in a democratic process for determining the destiny of their ancestral homeland. The final outcome of this process should be the independent, democratic State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly, at its fifty-fifth session, is considering the item entitled "Question of Palestine" against the backdrop of the new millennium. This comes at a time when the international community is reflecting on the rapidly changing global landscape, as well as rededicating itself to the vision of the United Nations Charter and to the strengthening of the Organization. Indeed, since the very inception of the United Nations, mankind has shown no greater yearning than that for unfettered freedom, impartial justice and sustained development. It is these objectives that will guarantee humankind continued prosperity and advancement in the twenty-first century.

The achievement of these noble goals is equally relevant to the Palestinian people. The implementation of the Millennium Declaration should be carried out not only in regard to the important economic and social issues that seize our attention, but also the unresolved problem of the question of self-determination of a whole nation and its people living under colonial subjugation. More than half a century of injustice

demands that the international community and the United Nations make concerted efforts to support the Palestinian people in their valiant struggle so that those long-cherished hopes will be realized and Palestine can take its rightful place as a sovereign Member State in the United Nations.

We had anticipated that this meeting would be one of great satisfaction, if the events originally scheduled had taken place as planned. In this regard, the provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum had stipulated the conclusion of a final peace agreement by 15 September 2000. Over the past year, that momentum was lost despite the discussions on permanent status negotiations at the Bolling Air Force Base near Washington in March through April 2000, the Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David in Maryland in July 2000 and the meetings held during the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, all of which failed to yield agreement, particularly on the question of Jerusalem.

In addressing this tenuous situation, the Palestinian leaders took a courageous decision to postpone the declaration of the establishment of a Palestinian State in September 2000 until the conclusion of a final peace agreement. Indeed, this laudable step reaffirms once again their unswerving commitment to peace. Israel, for its part, however, has yet to fully demonstrate its sincerity with regard to the peace process. Past peace accords entered into in good faith by the Palestinians have been subjected to procrastination, unilateral delay tactics and minimal implementation, which have often brought the peace process to the brink of disintegration. The anger of the Palestinian population at large over the slow pace of the peace negotiations is justifiable, for there has been more rhetoric than positive changes in the situation on the ground.

The peace process today stands at a critical crossroads. From the high level of optimism generated in Madrid in 1991, the path travelled by the concerned parties has been challenging and marked with major obstacles, while despair over the expansion of settlements and other untenable Israeli policies continues to cast a pall over the region. Since the signing of the 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, a considerable period of time, more than a year, has elapsed with few accomplishments.

Thus, at an important juncture when the concerned parties were dealing with critical permanent status negotiations, the provocative visit by Mr. Ariel Sharon to Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 28 September 2000 was profoundly disturbing in its consequences. For amid the frustration and bitterness of a people who felt betrayed by a peace that seemed to offer few concessions and no improvement in their daily lives, the visit triggered an onslaught of violence in the occupied territories reminiscent of past years, and it continues until this very day. Weeks of the use of excessive deadly force by Israel have led to scores of casualties, mostly among innocent Palestinian civilians. Indonesia deplores the tragic loss of life, in particular the death of many children. It cannot be denied that this deteriorating situation is the direct outcome of untenable policies of Israel's occupation and its utter failure to respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000) calling for an immediate cessation of the violence. Furthermore, the tenth emergency special session was resumed, in accordance with the "uniting for peace" formula, to consider the dangerous situation on the ground due to the lethal force deployed by Israel against the unarmed Palestinian people.

Given the grave and massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people by Israel, the Economic and Social Council has endorsed the decisions of the Commission on Human Rights including, inter alia, that on the need to establish on an urgent basis a human rights inquiry commission to gather information with the aim of preventing future abuses and to request the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Representative of the Secretary-General on displaced persons, as well as other concerned personalities, to carry out immediate missions to the occupied Palestinian lands and to report their findings to the General Assembly. In this regard, we have noted the recent visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the region to witness first hand the human rights abuses taking place. It is expected that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will follow up on her findings and recommendations.

Despite the important efforts made at Sharm el-Sheikh and Paris to stem the explosive violence and revive the peace process, the situation remains highly volatile. While we regret the attack on the Israeli civilian bus, there can be no legal justification for the Government of Israel to retaliate with such disproportionate use of military force on Palestinian territory. At this tense juncture, it is essential that a United Nations observer force be dispatched expeditiously to restore stability to the region.

In addition to this ongoing strife, the severe economic and social consequences inflicted on the Palestinian people are a source of increasing concern. This is largely due to the re-imposition of the Israeli closure policy, by which over 3 million Palestinians are isolated from the rest of the world. Draconian measures regarding external and internal closures are having a devastating effect on the nascent Palestinian economy. The international community should therefore call upon Israel to cease its military aggression against the Palestinian people and end the economic siege of the occupied territories.

Cognizant of the undeniable fact that there can be no alternative to striking out for real and genuine peace, we should not waste the historic opportunity before us. The Palestinian people's arduous years of struggle and sacrifice demand prompt actions on the part of the international community so that they can move towards a new century of peace, freedom and prosperity.

Indonesia, on its part, reiterates the imperative need to reach a comprehensive settlement to this intractable conflict, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and fulfilling the prerequisite conditions, namely, the full withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab lands; respect for the right of all States in the region to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries and the unfettered exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially their right to self-determination.

Finally, it is beyond doubt that the United Nations has a permanent historical responsibility regarding the question of Palestine. Ever since partition, this item has preoccupied the Organization, especially the injustices perpetrated against the Palestinian people. At this crucial hour, the international community should make every effort to reaffirm its solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people as they strive for peace and justice.

Mr. Ahmad (Pakistan): The issue of Palestine has been debated for well over half a century at the United Nations. The international community has unequivocally pronounced itself in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people for the inalienable right to self-determination. Over the years there have been brief periods of hope interspersed with long spells of disappointment and despair.

Today, instead of beginning the new millennium with the promise of peace in the Middle East, we are witnessing once again the slide of the region into a vicious cycle of spiralling violence. The provocative actions by certain elements in Israel who were bent on derailing the peace process ignited the present round of violence, which has claimed over 250 lives, including those of innocent Palestinian children. Insensitive high-handedness has provoked Palestinian defiance, with tragic consequences for all. We condemn all these deaths in the strongest terms and express our profound sympathies for the bereaved families.

The current situation warrants urgent attention. The international community must act with speed to prevent the region from slipping further into the abyss of violence and instability.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Summit last September was an effort to reverse the violence and re-establish peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Notwithstanding the good intentions, it was unable to restore normalcy in the region. The initiative taken by the Secretary-General in this connection has been most timely, and we encourage him to persevere in his efforts.

There are two issues at stake here. The first, of a more immediate nature, is the protection of the Palestinian people, who are being subjected to disproportionate and excessive use of force and measures verging on economic strangulation. The second is the broader fundamental issue of the realization by the Palestinians of their right of self-determination. Both issues need to be addressed and resolved.

As in the case of other peoples in similar circumstances, Pakistan has been a steadfast supporter of the just struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights. The Palestinian people, too, are

suffering the rigors of foreign occupation. The international community, particularly the guarantors of the peace process, must use their influence and good offices to ensure full Israeli compliance with the peace agreements and with its legal obligations and responsibilities as an occupying Power, under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949.

Faithful implementation of all agreements is essential to avert the return of the region to conflict and political turmoil. We urge the concerned parties to take the necessary measures to cease hostilities, restore calm and re-establish mutual trust. The leaders of Palestine and Israel must resume the steps that they had so boldly begun to take to change the destiny of the Middle East, moving away from conflict and towards peace and prosperity.

We believe that no lasting peace in the Middle East would be possible without achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory, including the dismantling of illegal settlements, are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process. The significance of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, Holy Jerusalem, for the international community in general and the Islamic Ummah in particular, requires no elaboration. Al-Quds Al-Sharif remains central to any comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

An overarching peaceful settlement of the Middle East question, by definition, must include the withdrawal by Israel from the Syrian Golan heights and full respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. The long-term stability and security of all in the region can only be guaranteed on the basis of the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that all peoples of the region will sooner rather than later realize the objective of a life in honour and dignity. Only then can the Middle East be at peace with itself.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our debate today on the question of Palestine coincides with the bloody events we are witnessing daily in the occupied Palestinian territories and the great deterioration caused by the slowdown in the peace process between the Arab and Israeli parties.

However, it has been clear in recent months that the peace efforts had achieved considerable progress and that after over half a century we were getting close to resolving animosity, tension and instability in our region. But suddenly the situation blew up in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip because of the provocative visit of the leader of the Israeli Likud Party. Then the Israeli war machine was launched in an excessive deployment of force. This has led to the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians who dreamed of a peaceful future, just like other people of the world.

Since the establishment of the United Nations, the question of Palestine has always been on its agenda. There have been many resolutions containing various specific mechanisms and provisions dealing with this problem and its related questions. Negotiations have taken place between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which made us believe that a solution was in sight. But it has become clear that as soon as Israel had to take a serious and decisive decision, it drew back, making prospects for peace more remote. This has led to a hardening of policies, distrust and scorn for the legitimate rights of others, as though Israel's destiny meant that force had to be used to achieve its goals and that the logic of force was stronger than peace and international laws as enshrined in United Nations resolutions, year after year, crisis after crisis. We wonder today, in the light of the bloody events taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories: is it not high time that the international community faced its responsibilities, through the United Nations specialized agencies, and forced Israel to honour its obligations under the principles of international law?

What is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories is a direct result of the ongoing Israeli occupation and the desecration of the holy sites. Israel's aggression and the closure of Palestinian villages has led to tension and violence. Today, more than ever before, Israel must honour its obligations under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and stop using excessive force, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) and the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

Furthermore, Israel must put an end to its military aggression and withdraw its war machine from Palestinian villages and the surrounding areas. Israel must agree to an international presence for the purpose of protecting the civilian population and must

cooperate seriously with the committee of inquiry led by Mr. George Mitchell, an outstanding personality who enjoys widespread support, so that the committee can do its job in the best possible manner.

The Palestinian question, as we are all aware, is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, its solution is tied to respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — namely, the right to self-determination, the right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes — so that the situation does not turn into a time bomb that can explode and upset regional stability.

The handling of the Palestinian question must be integrated into an overall and just settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the principle of land for peace, in keeping with the principles supported at the Madrid Conference, and on the return of the occupied Golan Heights to Syria in accordance with the 4 June 1967 border. In this context, Lebanon reaffirms its attachment to its sovereignty over the Shebaa farms, and we demand the immediate release of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails.

As has been stated by Arab leaders more than once, seeking peace is a strategic option that completely transcends geographical, historical and cultural incentives and factors. In return, Israel must consider this historical option of the Arab peoples. It must respond to the requirements for peace. It must move away from the logic of force and the siege mentality. History gives us ample examples of the ultimate downfall of those who pursue only force and arrogance.

Mr. Urib (Namibia): My delegation is a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and in that capacity we wholly subscribe to the report introduced yesterday by the Chairman of the Committee, my brother, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal.

The Committee has once again demonstrated its leadership qualities in the crucial role it is playing in the promotion of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which took place yesterday, was of particular significance, especially at a time when excessive and deadly violence continues to be unleashed by Israel against the people of Palestine. We were honoured to have participated in yesterday's memorable events, and on that occasion we expressed our delegation's sympathy with the families of those killed; we would like to reiterate our condolences today.

The real tragedy of the situation, however, is that the whole world remains paralyzed, unable or unwilling to effectively stop the violence against the people of Palestine. I would like, on behalf of my delegation, to take this opportunity to stress Namibia's unwavering support for the people of Palestine in their quest for peace, justice, statehood and the overall realization of their legitimate goals and aspirations.

The extreme force being used by Israeli defence forces through the use of helicopter gunships, missiles, tanks and other heavy armament has resulted in more than 250 deaths and thousands of injuries, the vast majority of them among Palestinians, mostly young people and children. Those atrocities must be fully investigated, and appropriate steps should be taken based on the results of the investigation. Israel, as the occupying Power, should scrupulously abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. My delegation is equally concerned about the illegal and humiliating economic blockade that is being imposed on the Palestinian people, resulting in tremendous suffering and in financial losses amounting to several hundred million dollars. Those actions, together with the military atrocities, violate every single provision of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Mr. Dangue Réwaka (Gabon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The observations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights are further testimony to those facts. My delegation calls on the international community to provide support and economic assistance to the Palestinian people to help them weather this humanitarian crisis.

Namibia strongly supports a peaceful solution to all disputes. The Middle East peace process, we thought, was progressing well until Mr. Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 28 September this year. That act unfortunately caused a setback to the peace process. My delegation, however, welcomes the strenuous efforts of the Secretary-General, of the President of the United States and of

regional leaders to rescue the situation. In that regard, the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh should be implemented without delay. It is particularly important that the fact-finding committee commence its duties expeditiously.

In the light of what I have said, it has become extremely urgent that a United Nations protection force be established to protect Palestinian civilians. The caucus of the Non-Aligned Movement yesterday afternoon prepared a Security Council draft resolution providing for the establishment of such a force. My delegation strongly supports that effort, and we hope that action will be taken on the draft resolution soon.

The events of the past few weeks have again proved that the question of Palestine is central to the whole Middle East peace process. In that regard, the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) can lead to a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict that will bring peace, security and stability to the region. At the same time, other resolutions of the Council, such as its resolution 1322 (2000), and resolutions of the General Assembly should be fully implemented. The United Nations should remain seized of this item until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence are fully realized.

We should therefore continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General and other interlocutors towards those goals.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): As the General Assembly debates agenda item 41, "Question of Palestine", I take pleasure in conveying our thanks to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report (A/55/639) submitted pursuant to the request made in resolution 54/42 of 1 December 1999 on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. We are grateful also for the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/55/35), submitted in accordance with resolution 54/39 of the same date.

Anyone who has been following the events in the occupied Palestinian territories will understand the enormous suffering that the Palestinian Arab people and other Arab peoples of occupied territories have endured. Israel's inhuman practices vis-à-vis the Arab population reflect the enormity of Israeli violations of the norms of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. They also pose a great challenge to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, which sets out the responsibilities of occupying Powers towards the population.

Here, I recall the 15 July 1999 Geneva Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, convened in response to a request made by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session. The Conference clearly determined that the Convention should apply to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. It also stressed the need for full respect for the provisions of the Convention in the occupied territories.

Regrettably, as we speak from this rostrum, the Palestinian people are being exposed to the most atrocious forms of repression and aggression at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces in their occupied land. The reality prevailing in the Palestinian territories is the continuation of Israeli attacks by shelling, the continuing economic blockade and attempts to block the arrival of foodstuffs, fuel and medical supplies to the Palestinian territories.

Let me review rapidly the talks that have taken place to put an end to the violence and to restore stability to the area — either directly or in the presence of other international parties, or through official arrangements such as the Paris and the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements or the direct contacts between President Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres and telephone talks between President Arafat and President Putin of Russia and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Barak. These talks and other agreements that came about as a result of these contacts were not carried out by the Israeli side either by the implementation of a ceasefire or by bringing life back to normal. Indeed, political negotiations have turned into violent negotiations on the ground, and Israel is trying to use its military force in an atrocious way to force the Palestinians to accept what they rejected during the political negotiations. Considering the fact that the Israeli side wishes to force the Palestinian side to accept a final settlement, and as long as the Palestinians refuse to do this, the Israelis continue their barbaric shelling of the Palestinian areas, and they continue their economic blockade, destroying all Palestinian institutions and causing suffering and famine to the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian uprising is still escalating. It has entered its third month, with the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan. The resistance still goes on, and great sacrifices continue to be made. The popular resistance has become a main factor in determining the future, and it has had great repercussions on the political situation in the Middle East. It is not possible now to go back to the negotiations that began nine years ago at the Madrid Conference. The uprising has become a real turning point in both thought and action. It has testified to the atrocities carried out by the Israeli Government and to its cruelty in dealing with civilians. It has also revealed the true face of settler colonialism and expansion.

His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, is head of the Islamic Summit Ministerial Committee, established and headed by our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani. Its members include the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Morocco and Senegal and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This Committee came to New York to hold a special closed meeting with the Security Council. His Excellency emphasized the fact that the uprising was imposed on the Palestinian people and that the number of martyrs is increasing. He said that funerals are taking place incessantly and that every household is steeped in sadness. He asked if it is possible for the universal human conscience to realize that the Palestinians have a right to enjoy freedom, like all other peoples in the world. He also said that they have chosen peace as a strategic option and that peace does not mean surrender; this has been affirmed by all peoples. The use of excessive force by the Israeli forces, he said, is unjustifiable, and many violations have been committed regarding the provisions of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. He called on the Security Council to take immediate measures to put an end to further deterioration of the situation and to put the peace process back on track, in accordance with the agreements reached through the relevant Security Council resolutions. He said they still believe that resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) provide a framework for action to reach a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

The Emir said that it is urgent and necessary at the present time for the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to take immediate measures to condemn the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and to ensure neutral international protection for the Palestinians so as to put an end to the violence against and the killing of Palestinians, as well as to ensure the safety of Holy Jerusalem and the rejection of Israeli sovereignty over Islamic holy sites. Finally, he stressed that the Palestinian people should be able to exercise their national rights, including the right to establish their independent State, with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. He called for the establishment of an international fact-finding mechanism, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1322 (2000).

It is necessary for the international community to stress Israel's responsibility for compensating the Palestinian citizens for the damages they have suffered.

It is not possible that the international community should allow the continuation of this bloody Israeli campaign against Palestinian civilians and the continued blockade of Palestinian territories. It is not possible for the human conscience to condone the continuation of this campaign of killing, of Israel's reign of terror and collective punishment against the Palestinian people. In this connection, I would like to reaffirm our call for the Security Council to quickly establish a United Nations protection force and to deploy it in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Holy Jerusalem, with a view to providing protection to the Palestinian civilians who are in dire need for it.

Mr. Levitte (France) *(spoke in French)*: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta align themselves with this statement.

Whereas it seemed we had never been so close to agreement on the permanent status, the crisis which has now been going on for more than two months has once again plunged Palestinian and Israeli families into mourning. It has once again set back the prospects for an agreement.

For the European Union, the priority is that violence should cease and that the negotiations should resume. We urge the parties to show their responsibility and to implement the wise measures that are required for this purpose, as agreed upon at the Sharm el-Sheikh

summit. However, the present crisis, which reflects deep frustration, clearly needs a courageous and generous political solution. The ways forward to that solution have already been indicated — that is, implementation of the commitments agreed upon at Sharm el-Sheikh, as well as of signed agreements and international law, in particular as regards the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In this context, as was stated last year in the General Assembly during the general debate on this same item, the European Union strongly insists on the need for each one to abstain from any activities which might prejudge the final outcome of the negotiations or harm the atmosphere. The lack of progress during the peace process, including on the settlements issue, is at the very core of the Palestinians' frustration and of the violence.

The very serious current situation notwithstanding, last year provided some causes for hope. At Camp David daring and constructive solutions were considered, notably on the most delicate issue of all: Jerusalem. These solutions for the first time opened up real prospects for settlement.

The European Union has voiced its opinion on this crisis on several occasions. We supported Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), in particular the Council's decision to deplore the act of provocation carried out on 28 September 2000 at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem and the subsequent violence that occurred there and at other Holy Places, as well as in other areas throughout the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We also supported the Council's condemnation of the acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against the Palestinians, which resulted in injuries and loss of human life.

Our assessment of the issue remains the same. The European Union has made every effort to put an end to the violence and to get the Israelis and Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. From Biarritz on 12 October the European Union appealed to the parties, and it was present at Sharm el-Sheikh on 15 and 16 October. A special envoy of the European Union played a significant role in the 1 November Arafat-Peres meeting, which led to an agreement on measures likely to put an end to the violence. In Marseilles these discussions were resumed and the commitments that had been made to return to the situation that prevailed before 28 September were reiterated.

The situation remains of deep concern. In two months there have been more than 300 deaths and thousands of wounded — the vast majority of them Palestinians, many of them children. This is unacceptable.

Confronted with the seriousness of this situation, even at the risk of repeating ourselves, the European Union stresses once again that the priority is to stop the violence. At the General Affairs Council on 20 November, the Foreign Ministers of the 15 countries again appealed to both sides' sense of responsibility not to respond to provocations. Let me remind the Assembly of their words:

> "For weeks now lives have been lost on a daily basis, both Palestinian and Israeli. This is an intolerable situation. The European Union appeals that both sides show their sense of responsibility by not responding to provocation.
>
> "The lack of progress in the peace process, including on the settlements issue, is the source of the Palestinian community's frustration and the violence.
>
> "The European Union urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to comply fully, without delay, with the undertakings entered into at Sharm el-Sheikh five weeks ago and in Gaza on 2 November.
>
> "It calls on the Israeli authorities to pull back their armed forces to the positions they occupied before 28 September and to end restrictions on the movement of goods and persons in the Palestinian territories; to lift the financial sanctions imposed on the Palestinian Authority; if action by the security forces appears absolutely necessary, to use non-lethal means only, as called for by the United Nations Secretary-General.
>
> "It calls on the Palestinian Authority to make every endeavour to bring the violence to an end; to issue strict instructions to the security forces to stop shooting at Israelis, in accordance with the statement made by President Arafat.
>
> "The European Union calls on the fact-finding committee, set up following the Sharm el-

Sheikh summit and in which the European Union is represented by Mr. Javier Solana, Secretary-General/High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, to commence its work on the ground without delay.

"We support the moves by the United Nations Secretary-General to examine with the parties the arrangements for an observer mission in accordance with the Security Council's mandate.

"We continue to support the endeavours and personal commitment of President Clinton in the search for peace.

"The goal naturally remains a resumption of the dialogue and the peace talks, as this is the only way out of the current crisis. The protagonists are well aware of it. Putting a stop to the violence is a matter of vital urgency.

"The European Union is willing to make a contribution. It is ready to assume its responsibilities."

After that quotation of the ministerial statement of the Union, I would like to stress that there is no substitute for a political solution. The European Union remains convinced that there is no other choice than negotiation to reach the peace which will allow the Palestinian people to regain faith in a better future. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principles adopted at the Madrid Conference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and on the agreements reached in Oslo and thereafter. It is on the basis of its declaration adopted in Berlin that the European Union confirms its commitment to seeing recognized and to supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, as well as its commitment to see these people achieve their national aspirations, including their right to a State. The European Union also reiterates the right of the Israeli people to security.

The European Union stresses the importance of implementing all the agreements that have been signed, in particular the interim agreements. We call upon the parties to expeditiously reach a mutually acceptable solution for the permanent status matters, in compliance with the Oslo accords and international law, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

As they stated in Marseilles on 17 November when they reiterated the common position they expressed in the declaration adopted in Berlin on 25 March 1999, the fifteen are willing to

"see established, in the short run, and preferably through negotiation, a sovereign democratic, viable and peaceful Palestinian State".

In Santa Maria da Feira, on 20 June, the Union had stressed how important it was to fully take into account, in the permanent status talks, the viability of any Palestinian State which could result from them.

Finally, I would like to stress that, with the consent of the parties, the United Nations can play a useful role: contributing to efforts to calm the situation and to seeking a lasting solution. At a modest and technical level, the computerization, under the auspices of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, of the property records of the Palestine mandate represents a useful contribution in preparation for a possible settlement of the refugee question, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of the General Assembly.

As everyone acknowledges, the Secretary-General's activities at the political level are irreplaceable, and his decisive role at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit has been unanimously lauded. The Security Council has given Mr. Kofi Annan a mandate to consult with the parties on modalities and an acceptable way to deploy a United Nations observer mission. It is our hope that a solution that is acceptable to both parties can be found without delay.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): First of all, on behalf of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I would like to express my profound sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives during the latest violence. At the same time, I would like to convey our deep appreciation to all those who have spent so much of their time and energy in trying to find a way to resolve the present crisis in the Middle East.

Last year, the world community witnessed some promising developments in the Middle East, in particular the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, which ended a prolonged deadlock in the peace process and renewed hopes for a final

settlement of the Palestine-Israel question. The tripartite Camp David Summit held in June last year was another important step forward in the efforts of the two parties concerned to resolve their differences. Despite the fact that the Summit did not produce a final agreement between Palestine and Israel, it nevertheless opened the door to dialogue on the most complex issue — an issue on which we were all pleased to see that significant progress had been achieved. We very much hoped at that time that the parties involved would pursue seriously and honestly their negotiations with a view to achieving a definitive solution to their problems. Regrettably, that earnest hope of the world community was immediately dashed by the bloody clashes that have occurred since the 28 September this year in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The situation on the ground has deteriorated further with each passing day, and the existence of peace and security remain in jeopardy. The Lao People's Democratic Republic expresses its concern over the current situation in the Middle East and strongly condemns all acts of violence and the excessive use of force against Palestinians. We also call for an immediate cessation of the violence and the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement of 17 October so as to pave the way for the resumption of negotiations and get the peace process back on track as soon as possible.

The question of Palestine has now become more complex. The peace process is now in grave danger. In our opinion, the best way to end the violence before it spreads even further is to help the parties concerned to move as fast as possible towards a final agreement. In that regard, we renew our call for the international community to continue to make political and diplomatic efforts to support and promote negotiations between Palestine and Israel with the aim of finding a just and comprehensive settlement of the ongoing conflict. As everyone knows, the Palestinian people have suffered for far too long. The world community must redouble its efforts and do everything possible to assist the two parties to resolve their problems.

As the question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East problem, no resolution in the Middle East can be envisaged that does not fully take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. Only when Palestinian issues are resolved in a just and reasonable manner, and when all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are restored, will Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace. In that context, my delegation wishes to reaffirm the Lao People's Democratic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinian people under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in their homeland, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The international community is duty-bound to continue to work to assist the Palestinian people in the search for a just and durable solution to their problem.

It is true that the road to peace is not an easy one. As we have all seen, numerous obstacles still remain. However, the cause of peace is just and represents the ardent hopes of the peoples of the region to live together, to cooperate and to coexist peacefully. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to do whatever we possibly can to stop the ongoing conflict and to ensure that the peace process in the Middle East can be put back on track. We firmly believe that dialogue will always remain the surest path to peace and security, rather than confrontation. The question of Palestine can be resolved only by peaceful means and in accordance with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Let us only wish all the best to the two parties directly concerned, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, in their efforts to resolve their differences.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): My delegation has read with great interest the report of the Secretary-General on the question of Palestine. This important document sums up the current situation, which is replete with many threats to the peace process, and also provides information on the initiatives and efforts under way to save the process.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary-General for the clarity of his report and to pay due tribute to him for his commitment and his courageous involvement in these efforts.

My delegation has also considered with particular attention the report by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which, I am pleased to say, is presided over by my colleague and friend, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal. I am pleased to have the opportunity once

again to express my appreciation to him for the great skill and dedication with which he is carrying out his lofty and sensitive mission.

Finally, my delegation would also like to express its gratitude to the artisans of peace who are working untiringly to restore peace to Palestine, the land of peace — here I am thinking in particular of President Clinton.

The current situation in Palestine, replete as it is with threats to regional and international peace and security, gives today's debate a tragic undertone and great significance. The peoples of the United Nations, full of hope, look to our Assembly with concern. They are expecting from this debate — the last one of the twentieth century devoted to the question of Palestine — new and decisive impetus for the dynamics of peace. Our people would like this Jubilee Year to be, for Palestine and thus for the Middle East,

> "a time of reconciliation between people, and of peace restored among nations, a time when swords are beaten into ploughshares and the clash of arms gives way to songs of peace." (*Pope John Paul II, Prayer for the Celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*)

Cameroon has joined in the efforts made by other States in the quest for hope and for the elements of a lasting peace in the Middle East. There is nothing surprising in that, of course, as Cameroon has consistently attached importance to the serious question of Palestine and the situation of peace in the Middle East. It has developed a position that is known for its consistency, level-headedness, and sense of truth and proportion.

Cameroon knows from experience that good actions make little noise, and that noise does little good. Cameroon has always devoted itself generously to the pursuit of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We are members of the Committee of Wise Men of Africa, mandated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which is calling for peace in the Middle East and pleading for the inalienable right of the Arab Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of a state, as well as for the right of all States in the region, including Israel, to live in peace within secure and recognized borders.

For Cameroon, the problem of Palestine was not grafted onto the vexing general problem of the Middle East. It is not a secondary element in a larger conflict. No, the question of Palestine is the origin, and at the very heart of, the crisis in the Middle East. Its solution is a prerequisite for peace.

Our insistence on the right of Palestinians to a homeland and our recognition of Israel's right to exist arise from the same fundamental consideration, to which we give extremely high priority — namely, that land, as an essential element of the State, cannot be dissociated from the entity of the State. This principle has been enshrined in law and in practice, and Cameroon has endorsed it. Consequently, my country cannot, does not and will never accept attempts to annex or to occupy the territory or part of the territory of a State, tiny though it may be, by another State.

In addition, Cameroon would go above and beyond substantive law, to the level of the human conscience, in affirming that it is unacceptable for an entire people — the Palestinian people — to be reduced to the status of refugees — homeless, stateless, and with no future. Cameroon has always said, and reiterates today, that any just and lasting solution to the problem of the Middle East which takes a comprehensive, not partial, approach must include the strict application by all interested parties of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973), and of General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX) establishing the Palestinian dimension of the conflict.

For almost half a century now the Arab and Israeli peoples have been living in a permanent state of tension. Despite the resolutions and agreements achieved to promote peace, which is so dear to this region, we are still far from attaining that objective. How can we explain this ongoing bloody conflict between two peoples who are united by the brotherhood attested to in the holy books — *The Bible* and *The Koran*? How are we to understand this ongoing conflict between two peoples whose culture should be the foundation of brotherhood?

The Hebrew language and the Arabic language are both written from right to left and share the same roots. Let me take as an example — which I would like to come back to later on — the words *shalom* and *salaam*.

These two peoples must live together on the same land, hence the proposal made by the Peel Commission in 1937 to divide Palestine into two States, one Jewish,

the other Arab. In November 1947, the General Assembly adopted a partition plan based on that proposal. That was resolution 181 (II), which envisaged a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine, as well as special status for Jerusalem.

The failure to respect that resolution and their common brotherhood has led, through successive denials and refusals to recognize each other, to self-destructive and fratricidal warfare between two peoples united by the land. Like the Africans, these peoples attach capital importance to the land, which was not made to absorb the blood of men spilled by other men. The land was made to allow mankind to prosper and people and nations to achieve their destinies. The current warfare runs counter to that plan and to the very logic of the land.

During this debate, we have recalled various initiatives undertaken to dampen the fires that have burned since 1947 in the Middle East. I would refer to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979 and, especially, the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and the Oslo accords. This glimmer of light in stormy skies led us to believe that we were evolving irreversibly and inevitably towards peace and that peace was at hand. In fact, that hope was confirmed as the years passed. Unfortunately, it seems to have dissipated in September 2000 following the visit of Mr. Sharon to Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Since then, the situation in the Middle East has again become critical and may well deteriorate if nothing is done to halt the current wave of violence and killing and to restore the peace process.

Is it not time to move beyond the legal bases we have laid down in numerous resolutions adopted to date? In other words, can ethical values not give us a greater chance of achieving peace? The Palestinian and Israeli peoples are brothers. The ethic of brotherhood has fated them to live together in the context of the theory of positive difference and the ecology of life. Life is the supreme value to which all peoples cling. It is a value that we must promote and defend against all sorts of threats. In this regard, what is good for some must also be good for others. There is thus no need for so much bloodshed in order to achieve peace.

Palestinians and Israelis are brothers, but different, because brotherhood necessarily includes difference. It is this difference that enriches and gives meaning to humanity. Let us become enriched by our mutual differences, as Paul Valéry urged. Thus, in looking positively upon difference, the other ceases to be my enemy and may be perceived as one who has the same needs and aspirations as I do – in brief, to be someone who, like me, has a right to life. Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not spill innocent blood — these are the most essential of lessons. The right to life also entails the right to a State or nation; a right to land; a right to security. Palestinians and Israelis must enjoy the same rights in the name of the principles I have evoked.

Peace and prosperity are therefore possible in the Middle East only if ethical values become the norm for all. At the Millennium Summit, the President of the Republic of Cameroon, Mr. Paul Biya, advocated the promotion of ethics in a world bereft of values. Peace between Palestinians and Israelis must entail recognition of and scrupulous respect for the dignity of the human person and his natural rights: the right to be different, the right to land and the right to establish free and democratic States.

The Palestinian and Israeli peoples, with the assistance of the international community, have made some clear progress towards peace. Today more than ever before, these peoples desire peace. It is up to their political and religious leaders to demonstrate greater courage and a lucid sense of history by deciding to return with resolve to the dialogue leading to a just peace. A just peace is one in which all parties have participated. A just peace is one that emerges from dialogue and negotiation free of violence. A just peace is not imposed by force of arms; peace imposed by the strongest is always doomed to failure.

By deciding to rejoin together the path of dialogue leading to a just peace, our leaders will have left their mark on the end of this century. It is up to us to develop around them, about them and in them a culture of peace. It is, in fact, essential for men, women and young people in the Middle East to become involved in a process of education and the transformation of mentalities and practices in order to drain the quagmire of violence and allow love to spring forth. Peace will reign in the Middle East when the inhabitants of Palestine — Israelis and Palestinians — decide to become the artisans of love, the builders of peace, the inventors of peace.

Peace is not automatic. It is not a return to the point of departure. It requires effort and creativity. Peace has to be invented, and it is invented first in the

heart of man and in his relationship to others. In order to build and invent peace, one must have an open heart. The inventor of peace learns from the experience of suffering and the misery of others. To invent peace is to work together for a society of justice and fraternity.

The people of Palestine, Israelis and Palestinians, were on their way to becoming the inventors of peace, which they call by single name: "*shalom/salaam*". In their land, this name takes on a far vaster breadth than the simple word "peace". It implies the well-being of daily existence, the state of a man who lives in harmony with himself, others and nature. It implies perfect happiness. *Shalom/salaam* is fullness, wholeness, the flourishing of humankind. *Shalom/salaam* is harmony in fraternal life. *Shalom/salaam* refers to the mutual confidence that can solder an alliance or a treaty between neighbours. *Shalom/salaam* is an entire programme, an entire school of thought and an entire culture of peace.

Peace in the Middle East, we have said, is possible only if Palestinians and Israelis decide to invent it. The pursuit of this peace requires the involvement of all of us. During this crucial and decisive phase the peoples of Palestine and Israel, the peoples of the Middle East, say to us, "For more than 50 years, we have learned to make war; now help us to make peace".

Peace in the Middle East will be the result of our solidarity — a solidarity that combines strength and effort. United we are strong; let us unite for peace.

In conclusion, I would like to say to all that the face of peace in the Middle East will be our face. It will be of all ages. It will be you; it will be me; it will be all of us. Peace in the Middle East will be in each of us. We must never forget this — in our words and in our acts.

Mr. Lancry (Israel) (*spoke in French*): Before continuing in English, I would like to pay deep homage to the last speaker, the Permanent Representative of Cameroon. He showed himself to be an excellent advocate of peace. On behalf of the State of Israel and its people, I think that it is only right to commend him for his sublime speech, which covered both political and philosophical considerations. I think we should all carefully weigh those ethical, spiritual, cultural and even linguistic considerations, such as the pairing of *shalom and salaam*. As he said, these words represent a whole programme, a whole culture. On behalf of Israel, I thank you.

(spoke in English)

Today's agenda item, the "Question of Palestine", first came before the General Assembly at its second session, more than 50 years ago, and is one important part of the larger question of peace in the Middle East, an issue which has been of primary concern to the United Nations since its establishment. Over the years, this question has taken on many different forms. It is our belief that in that time the parties have found the appropriate formulas with which to address this question.

When the question first arose, Israel was in a state of war with every one of its neighbours — each one of them committed to the destruction of the nascent Jewish State. This arose from the categorical rejection in 1947 of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) by all the States members of the Arab League, as well as the Palestinian leadership. Rather than abide by the will of the international community, those States chose the path of military aggression. While this aggression was successful in destroying resolution 181 (II), it failed in its other avowed purpose, namely, the crushing of the State of Israel.

And yet, we have since made great strides under the stewardship of noble, courageous and visionary leaders — both Arab and Israeli — who were capable of seeing beyond the immediate political imperatives, who dared to picture a future that held more promise than the war-torn past and who marched relentlessly towards that goal. Guided by such leaders, Egypt, and later Jordan, embraced the reality that the future of the region would henceforth be determined not on the battlefield, but through peaceful negotiations and reconciliation with Israel. In both cases, Israel responded and eagerly sought to anchor the political agreements with tangible gains in tourism, trade and increased prosperity. These efforts have bestowed upon Israel, Egypt and Jordan the benefits of quiet borders, diplomatic contacts and the freedom to pursue life's bounty free from the threat of war and bloodshed.

These efforts have also illustrated a powerful point: rejection of violence, direct negotiations and courageous leadership can reverse decades of hatred and hostility. In such an environment, peace is no longer an abstract ideal. Nor is it a mystery. History

has shown us a path; all that remains is for us to follow it.

And so, the question of Palestine is not today what it was a half century ago. We no longer need to debate the question of how best to achieve a peaceful settlement in the region. The method has been proved — twice — and the formula is well understood: it requires the renunciation of violence and a commitment to bilateral negotiations. Today, the question of Palestine is no longer how to achieve a settlement, but whether we are ready to do so. Are both sides prepared to take those courageous steps that are so demonstrably the most expedient way to resolve our conflicts and create a better world for our children?

On the Israeli side, the answer is clear. Israel has gone to great lengths to ensure that the historic breakthrough of the Oslo agreements results in a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. At the Camp David Summit this past July, Prime Minister Ehud Barak expressed a readiness to consider compromises that would have been inconceivable a mere two years ago. The major points of contention between Israel and the Palestinians were deliberated, and significant progress was made on all fronts. Prime Minster Barak even expressed his readiness to accept the establishment of a Palestinian State, provided it was born out of negotiation and compromise with Israel. The goal of peace was within reach.

Even the most sensitive of issues, the future of Jerusalem, was discussed at Camp David. I would like at this point to say a few words on this issue, which lies at the core of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and specifically on that sacred tract of land at the city's heart, known to Muslims as Al-Haram Al-Sharif and to Jews and Christians as the Temple Mount.

The Temple Mount is not merely another holy site in the eyes of the Jewish people. It is not just one place among many where one can pray and feel the intimate presence of God. Rather, the Temple Mount is, in the words of Foreign Minister Ben-Ami, "the genetic code of the Jewish identity".

For over 2,000 years, Jews the world over have faced the Temple Mount three times a day in prayer. Twice we have been forcibly evicted from Jerusalem and twice we have returned. Throughout our two millennia of exile, the city has served as a focal point, uniting the Jewish people and sustaining our hopes and dreams for a return to our ancestral home in Zion.

How refreshing it is that even the sources of other faiths speak of the special connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem. The Koran mentions the Temple in several places, specifically in verses 17:7 and 34:13, but in other places as well. According to Muslim tradition, Caliph Umar wanted to build his mosque on the Temple Mount specifically because that was the location of the Temple built by King Solomon. This is even acknowledged by Muslim scholars, among them Court Judge Mujir Aldin Alkhanbali, who wrote in his *History of Jerusalem and Hebron* that

> "David reigned for forty years and before he died he passed the monarchy on to his son Solomon and told him to build the Temple (Beit Almikdas)."

This expression, Beit Almikdas — that is, the House of the Temple — became in many Muslim sources a synonym for the word Jerusalem.

And yet, despite this unique and powerful connection, Israel was willing to consider various compromise possibilities that could have ended the conflict over this site and satisfied the needs and aspirations of both sides.

To our great sadness, barely four months after Camp David, virtually all evidence of Israel's efforts has been erased from the Palestinian consciousness. The current crisis is the single greatest setback in Israeli-Palestinian relations in decades. This situation has emerged despite the fundamental commitment made by Chairman Arafat at the outset of the peace process. In his letter of 9 September 1993 to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Chairman Arafat stated the following:

> "The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security ... The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations ... the PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators."

At the time, Chairman Arafat spoke on behalf of all the Palestinian people, including all the various factions. Therefore, we cannot except a division of labour between the Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and the Hamas and Islamic Jihad on the other. As a leader, Chairman Arafat must embrace not only the glory of his charge, but also the misery of his task.

And yet, Chairman Arafat appears intent on pursuing this path. Despite his commitment — which was an obvious prerequisite for embarking on the road prescribed by the Declaration of Principles — the events of the last two months cast serious doubt on whether the Palestinian leadership remains intent on its fulfilment.

Beyond this uncertainty lie other matters which call into question the commitment of the Palestinians to finish the process that we have jointly undertaken. We know that the renunciation of violence is only a beginning. Peace requires far more. It requires a culture of peace — *shalom/salaam* born out of a recognition of the legitimacy of the other side and its right to live in peace and security. Peace requires an end of boycotts, of contempt and defamation, the end of incitement and confrontation. Peace requires a language of peace, expressed in the way leaders address their nations, in the way teachers teach their students and in the way religious leaders inspire their followers.

Unfortunately, in this realm as well, we fail to perceive a resolve on the part of the Palestinians to engage us in the language of peace. The Palestinians' resignation to Israel's existence has not been internalized; it has failed to percolate down to all levels of Palestinian society. The Palestinian educational system, media, religious leadership and preachers in mosques, continue to foment an abysmal hatred for the State of Israel, Zionism, and the entire Jewish nation. Textbooks in Palestinian schools fail to even recognize the existence of the State of Israel. The official media continue to incite the population to violence against Israelis and perpetuates the image of Israel as the eternal enemy of the Palestinian people, as the source of all their misery.

Muslim clerics, whose voices are regularly transmitted over the airwaves, have encouraged a violent jihad against Israelis and Jews around the world, a call which has already reverberated in Europe, the United States and beyond. To cite but one example, Nabil Shaath, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation for the Palestinian Authority, in a speech made back in January of 1996 — a period in which negotiations were going forward — said,

> "We decided to liberate our homeland step-by-step ... Should Israel continue — no problem. And so, we honour the peace treaties and non-violence ... if and when Israel says 'enough' ... in that case it is saying that we will return to violence. But this time it will be with 30,000 armed Palestinian soldiers and in a land with elements of freedom ... If we reach a dead end we will go back to our war and struggle like we did forty years ago."

So I submit to members once again that the real question of Palestine is, are the Palestinians ready and willing to make peace? That is a question to which we must direct our attention today, for it is this ambiguity that stands as a final obstacle to achieving a lasting settlement and commencing the new era of peace and coexistence in the Middle East.

In recent weeks there have been increasingly frequent calls for the deployment of an international force in the region. My Government's position on this question is well known, but I wish at this time to say a few words on this subject.

Israel maintains that just as the current violence began with a calculated and deliberate order from the Palestinian leadership, so must it end. There is no need for international intervention to bring an end to the hostilities. Rather, what is required is the necessary resolve of the Palestinian leadership to renounce the confrontational approach and to implement the steps outlined at Sharm el-Sheikh. This has yet to occur. Chairman Arafat has failed to abandon the path of bloodshed, not because he is unable to, but because from his point of view it is far too valuable for improving his negotiating position to be relinquished. It is this ambiguity that leads to the worrisome conclusion that Chairman Arafat prefers to pursue his objectives unilaterally, rather than standing by the commitments he has undertaken to address claims and grievances through direct bilateral negotiations. We consider Chairman Yasser Arafat's demand that the United Nations send an international force to the region to be the first step on the path to internationalizing the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, an action that runs completely contrary to the bilateral spirit of the peace process.

If there is a time for an international presence in the region, it would be only after the parties have found an agreed political solution. This has always been the accepted sequence. Israel was able to conclude lasting peace treaties with two of its neighbours without the need for an international force or direct United Nations intervention. In the case of Egypt, a multinational presence was established to monitor peace and security arrangements in the Sinai only after the parties had reached an agreement of their own volition.

We still hold out hope that the Palestinian leadership will fulfil the numerous commitments it has made to restrain its people, disarm illegal militias, control terrorist elements and incitement of the official media and act immediately to prevent all forms of attack on Israeli soldiers and civilians. This is the obvious course of action, one that would bring the violence to a speedy conclusion and lay the groundwork for a return to peaceful negotiations. The current situation stands as one in which there is both a formula for ending the violence and a formula for establishing peace. What is lacking is the determination on the part of the Palestinian leadership.

As a body that has been concerned with the fate of the Middle East for more than half a century, the General Assembly must take care to lend its unqualified support to the parties as they seek to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement. Attempts to use this forum to legitimize a departure from the path of negotiations or to utilize this podium as a sounding board for anti-Israeli rhetoric must be roundly rejected.

Israel is therefore opposed to the draft resolutions currently under consideration. Three of the draft resolutions refer to United Nations programmes and bodies that promote a distorted and one-sided perspective of the issue. The fourth one contradicts bilateral agreements already signed between Israel and the Palestinians, and thus undermines the peace process it professes to support. For these reasons, we urge Member States to oppose these draft resolutions.

I further urge members, in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, to call on the Palestinian people to abandon the spirit of confrontation and to determine the future on the road of peace, dialogue and reconciliation.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate under this item. I wish to inform Members that the Assembly will take action on draft resolutions A/55/L.45, A/55/L.46, A/55/L.47 and A/55/L.48 tomorrow morning, Friday, 1 December 2000, as the second item.

I shall now call on the observer of Palestine, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I felt fully satisfied when the Israeli representative began his statement by welcoming the statement of the Permanent Representative of Cameroon. I considered this the beginning of a balanced statement that could contribute to progress. Regrettably, that positive introduction, with which I fully agree, did not lead to the natural result I expected. We heard once again the same type of Israeli statements.

Allow me first to say quickly that by its nature, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is an international conflict. The Palestinian party is not trying to internationalize the struggle because it is inherently an international struggle. We have repeatedly reaffirmed this, and the United Nations has also repeatedly reaffirmed its ongoing responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian question until a real solution is found to this question in all its aspects.

The negative position taken by Israel, which we heard expressed a few minutes ago, concerning the efforts made to establish a United Nations military observer force is a regrettable one. It emphasizes Israel's hostility towards the United Nations, on the one hand, and affirms the fact that it does not want to end the regrettable bloodshed of the last two months, on the other. Israel has not given any logical reason for this rejection; not now or before.

Of course, we differ concerning the historical background about which the Permanent Representative of Israel spoke. We differ with his view about the correct formula for peace. He spoke of renouncing violence and about commitment to negotiations; we view that as the way to achieve peace, but not as the formula that is necessary, because the formula on which we have agreed is land for peace, that is an end to Israeli occupation in exchange for the establishment of peace. That is the core issue.

The Permanent Representative of Israel spoke of the issue of Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Here again, we differ concerning the historical background of that issue. He spoke of an eternal Israeli or Jewish presence in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. We are obliged to note that for at least the past 1,300 years, with few interruptions, the holy city has been under Arab Islamic rule. Despite that, we have offered to compromise and have expressed our readiness to accept Israeli control of the Wailing Wall, which is the western wall of that holy site, even though it is part and parcel of occupied East Jerusalem, to which Security Council resolution 242 (1967) applies. But what Israel wants is to share with us sovereignty over the Islamic holy sites: over Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including the Al-Aqsa mosque, which is the first kiblah and the third holiest sanctuary. In other words, Israel wants us to agree, either now or in the future, to change the facts on the ground. That has never happened before in the history of Islam, and it will not happen now.

On this matter, we call upon the Israeli side to demonstrate full respect for all other religions, including, of course, Islam. We call upon the Israelis to accept the facts on the ground, to accept the logical course and to accept the inherent rights of the Palestinian people, the Arab people and the Islamic nation.

The Israeli delegation insists on complicating issues by talking about particular personalities and particular leaders, and by insisting on dealing with the elected leader of the Palestinian people. For our part, we have never spoken about specific individuals. We have never attempted to personalize matters.

But still, let me very briefly review the record of the present leader of Israel, our putative partner in the peace process. Mr. Barak is responsible for the bloody military campaign that the Israeli forces are now waging against the Palestinians, and for all the killings, injuries and destruction it has caused. Mr. Barak has not genuinely implemented any of the pledges he has made or any of the agreements we have reached. Mr. Barak has not withdrawn from one inch of territory, other than from the areas from which his predecessor, Mr. Netanyahu, agreed to withdraw. Mr. Barak has built more illegal settlements than any other Israeli Prime Minister since the beginning of the peace process, with all their negative impact on that process.

Let me reiterate once again the central issue, which the Israeli side has yet to grasp: the core of the problem is Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and of the Palestinian people. Peace can thus be achieved only with an end to that occupation. That, of course, requires that the two parties deal with each other on an equal and balanced footing, not on the basis of force or of occupation against oppressed, occupied people. The use of force, much less the excessive use of force, will not solve this problem and will not lead to peace. What is needed is a real change in the mindset of the occupying force, which refuses to accept us as an equal people with equal standing and with equal rights.

We remain committed to the peace process, but on the agreed basis, leading to two States, including a sovereign Palestinian State with its capital at Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to inform members that document A/INF/55/3/Add.4, containing a revised programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings of the General Assembly until 15 December 2000, has been circulated to delegations this morning and is also available at the documents distribution counter in the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.